

WASHINGTON – Today, U.S. Representative Mike Quigley (IL-05) introduced The Visa Waiver Program Enhanced Security and Reform Act, a bipartisan bill that will enhance the national security benefits of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) while expanding the framework to welcome new countries like Poland into the program, and boost the economy.

**“Modernizing the Visa Waiver Program will strengthen our national security and enhance international relationships with important allies like Poland, who have been denied visa-free travel because of an outdated regime.”** said Rep. Quigley. **“I hope this bill will move quickly through Congress and to the President’s desk, opening the doors for Poland once and for all.**

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VWP affords foreign nationals of participating countries up to 90 days of visa-free travel to the United States. 36 countries are currently eligible for visa-free travel as designated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in consultation with the State Department. Current law uses the visa refusal rate as one of the enumerators for designation in the program, and that number has held Poland outside of designation.

Quigley has been working on this effort in a bicameral, bipartisan partnership with U.S. Representative Steve Chabot (R-OH) in the House and Senators Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Mark Kirk (R-IL), who introduced companion legislation in the Senate today.

Quigley’s bill has been formally [endorsed by President Obama](#) , who [spoke earlier this month](#) in favor of VWP expansion. The legislation also has the support of the U.S. Travel Association, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, American Hotel and Lodging Association, and National Retail Federation.

“In Poland last month, Senator Kirk outlined his goal of adding Poland to the Visa Waiver Program (VWP),” said a **spokesperson for Senator Kirk**. “Poland is a strong ally of the United States, plays a critical role in NATO military operations in Europe and the Middle East and its citizens should be afforded the right of visa-free travel to this country. Senator Kirk is eager to work with Sens. Mikulski and Cardin and Reps. Quigley and Chabot on this effort and looks forward to passing this bicameral, bipartisan legislation to include Poland into the VWP.”

Expansion of the VWP would bring increased revenue to the travel industry at a time when America's economy needs it most. In 2008, VWP countries generated more than 16 million visits to the U.S., accounting for 65% of all overseas arrivals that year. VWP travelers spent more than \$51 billion in the U.S., which generated an estimated 512,000 jobs, \$13 billion in payroll, and \$7.8 billion in taxes for the U.S. economy.

The bill also enhances national security by encouraging information sharing between the United States and member countries and requiring the timely reporting of lost or stolen passports. In addition, VWP participants are required to maintain enhanced counterterrorism, law enforcement, border control, and document security standards. Enhanced security procedures were added to the program following the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007, including a provision allowing DHS to determine, prior to travel, whether an otherwise VWP-eligible traveler poses a security risk to the United States.

Rep. Quigley's bill would make the primary qualifying criteria for VWP participation both a low overstay rate, set at less than three percent of foreign nationals who remain in the United States after their visa expires, as well as a three percent refusal rate, or applicants denied travel at U.S. consular offices abroad. Should a country meet the criteria, the Secretary of DHS may then waive the refusal rate criteria from three to ten percent on a country-by-country basis, which opens the door for Poland's inclusion.

"Improving the Visa Waiver Program will create and sustain American jobs. It strengthens our alliances, enhances our security, and allows millions to visit the United States and spend their money here," **Senator Mikulski** said. "A grandmother from Gdansk shouldn't need a visa to visit her grandkids in Baltimore. I've fought for years to ensure that we expand this important program in a way that keeps our borders secure while allowing travelers who want nothing other than to see family, conduct business, or tour our great country to do so without going through a long and expensive process. This bill updates the Visa Waiver Program so that our State Department may direct limited consular resources where they are needed most to keep our country safe and secure."

"Including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Poland and Taiwan in the U.S. Visa Waiver Program benefits the U.S. and visitors from our allied nations in a number of ways," **said Rep. Chabot (R-OH)**. "These countries, who have traditionally been friendly to the United States, would be included with countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, France and Ireland. This program has a truly beneficial impact on our American economy by providing a welcomed boost to the tourism

industry, and I am pleased to join with companies from right here in Ohio like International Paper, in supporting it.”

Rep. Quigley has been a staunch advocate for expanding VWP and recently [testified before Congress](#) on the benefits of including Poland and other diplomatic partners. Earlier this month, Rep. Quigley [traveled to Poland](#) to speak with state officials on the issue. The Polish government repealed its visa requirement for U.S. citizens traveling to Poland in 1991.

Illinois’ 5th Congressional District is home to more than 100,000 citizens of Polish ancestry. More than one million Poles call Chicago home, the highest concentration of any city outside of Warsaw.